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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the evolution and implementation of an interdisciplinary freshman program in world civilization designed to integrate history content with advanced English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) composition, focusing on academic language use. In it, a three-credit history course is paired with a six-credit ESL composition course. The program is also intended to help shorten the time ESL students spend in non-credit, developmental/remedial courses and to save these students' financial aid to pay for required courses. The history course consists of a large lecture section of approximately 100 students, about half of whom are freshman ESL students. The role of the ESL composition teacher is to show students how to conceptualize and manipulate major historical themes while expanding their English language skills. The history teacher is required to prepare for and accommodate ESL students in the syntax and vocabulary of lectures, assignments, and tests. The program brought 62 percent of ESL students not eligible for core courses safely through the history course with grades of C or better, compared to 54 percent for core-eligible students concurrently enrolled in freshman composition, and generally fared better than other comparison groups. (MSE)

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Teaching Freshman History to ESL Students: A Model

by Gladys Carro

The relationship between language proficiency and academic success has been a much debated issue on the 21 campuses of the City University of New York system. The issue continues to be debated and, depending on the current political climate, provides the basis for public policy disagreements over the fundamental issue of who may attend a senior college in the CUNY system. The common policy of excluding ESL students from four year colleges because they have not passed the entry reading and/or writing test would be merely ludicrous if it were not such a destructive act of misguided public policy.

Anticipating this change in political climate, in 1994 faculty from ESL and History crossed departmental lines and integrated the content of World Civilization, and advanced ESL composition in an effort (1) to teach language through content, i.e., English for Academic Purposes: (2) to shorten the time ESL students spend in non-credit developmental/remedial courses; and (3) to save their financial aid to pay for required courses.

Although deficiencies in the students' reading and writing placement exams made them ineligible for core-level work the pairing model, used since 1995, has been extremely successful. In 1998, the Humanities Division of the School of Liberal Arts and Science granted formal special dispensation to the students involved in the project. These students, if successful, thereby advanced their course selections by one full year.

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The curricular model challenges prevailing practices in at least two significant ways. First, the World Civilization 101 course takes the form of a large lecture section of about 100 students, as compared to the normal section sizes of about 30. Of the 100 students, about half are pre-freshmen ESL students. This simple inclusion of second language learners with core-eligible students has made our ESLers aware of the limitations they have in world geography and the limited knowledge of the distinct peoples and religions of the world. Normally, such second language students would be taught as a group and remain with one teacher.

The second major deviation represented by this research model is related to the question of how ESL students should be brought to core level credit-bearing normative college work. Over the years , the practice put reading and writing deficient students through several semesters of unlinked ESL courses prior to entrance to core. Most of the courses used skills development books but excluded a concentrated body of knowledge that students could "tap" when asked to write about something other than personal experiences. Our approach integrated reading and writing college skills concurrently with core content.

The Model is particularly apt for our distinctive student body. The student population of the City College resembles a demographic kaleidoscope, acutely reflecting the movement of peoples from around the world .The last survey taken identified over 80 countries and 52 languages spoken. More than half of the underclassmen were born in another country, with this percentage trending upward. It must be understood that the student body of such remarkable constitution has little knowledge in common. Individual students are usually well grounded in some particular national and regional history and its dominant culture. Moreover, our students tend to multilingualism -- a minimum of two if not more, even if English is not included in the locally

used languages. These freshmen have come to the United States with neither a sense of this new home nor experiences with other peoples of the world.

Given the nature of this student body, it seems uncomprehensible to exclude those with temporary writing deficiencies from the rest of the student body. Hence, the philosophy behind our model is intensive mainstreaming with 6 to 9 hours of support, including the often overlooked matter of hearing dialect English--students must listen to all professors speaking, male, female, Blacks, Whites, Asians each with distinct tones and accents. By contrast, simply listening to one ESL teacher in a course limited to developmental skills was, in my opinion, insufficient preparation for success in the larger college community.

The Courses

World Civilization is a 3 hour, 3-credit bearing lecture course, covering the rise of mankind from earliest history down to about 1500CE. Its requirements are integrated into the course content of the composition class. ESL Composition is a 6 hour, 0-credit bearing course. All writing in ESL has historical themes or a historical connection to the themes required in history. The college skills taught in ESL class are those directly needed to fulfill requirements for World Civilization.

Role of the Teachers

What the ESL teacher is NOT-- is a tutor for individual students or class. Nor is the ESL teacher a reader for the World Civilization instructor. Each of the paired faculty in this model retains the full integrity of their course, corrects and grades papers, advises students, and assigns a final grade. As is made clear, the concept of pairing -- to have any meaning, demands a cooperative and dynamic relationship between the courses.

The ESL teacher is primarily responsible for showing students how to conceptualize and manipulate the major themes while simultaneously expanding their English language skills. The ESL teacher must absorb

the content themes of the linked course. Many freshman survey courses cover a huge amount of material and equate success with memorization and mastery of facts. For the most part, such an approach will not be a successful technique for achieving success. ESLers have a tendency to try to write down everything in a lecture course. They are insecure about the language and feel they may miss an important point unless they write everything down. These compilations of notes tend to be random collections of fact and commentary, lack cohesion, and provide scant understanding of the development of the course. Additionally, the weaker readers will underline the entire text. Therefore, when studying for an exam, students have difficulty isolating the general themes from the facts and supporting information.* As a consequence, the style of pedagogy most conducive for ESLers is a pedagogy based on clearly discernible major themes, with the course progress constantly relating each of the individual parts of the course to the development of large generalizations.

When planning a paired course, attention must be paid to the modalities through which ESL students are receiving most of their undergraduate instruction, from introductory courses onward. Believing that the ESL teacher can do what was done prior to linking and simply "tag on" a few extra activities is a prescription for failure.

The history teacher too must prepare for receiving ESL students. The vocabulary used in the lecture will be unfamiliar. Occasionally, paraphrasing is necessary. The individual must be particularly sensitive to speaking rapidly. The development of prompts or questions on exams must be clear and capable of being understood. And, most importantly, when reading papers or exams, syntax errors that do not obscure the meaning of what is being communicated must not be punished severely.

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*When ESL 30 is paired with ESL 99.1 a reading course, the pairing is tighter. When a reading class is included in the block, the instructor reviews the reading assignments, vocabulary, central ideas, and anticipates the lecture on the material.

Weekly conferences with the ESL teacher are necessary. It is also important for the history instructor to visit the ESL composition class and help to make the connection between the two courses tighter. Students use such visits as an opportunity to ask questions not normally done in a large lecture hall. Visits also demonstrate to students the faculty's common involvement in their success.

The Data

Prior to examining the data and considering its inferences, some features of this linking of core with language and skills development--need to be clarified. Success has depended primarily on the cooperative relationship between instructors. Without any sense of hierarchy, instructors collaborated by producing complementary syllabi, readings, exams, and regular evaluations of their common students. The success of pairing ESL with a rich content course like World Civilization is made abundantly clear by the statistical data taken from student transcripts and the college mainframe.

The comparisons of performance suggested by data over the course of several semesters are dramatic. It is well noting that the core-eligible students passed all entrance skills assessment in reading and writing. Many had completed Freshman composition and were entering core. There were other core eligible students that were enrolled in freshman composition concurrently with World Civilization. In general, all core eligibles students were not deemed remedial.

Our project brought 62% of ESL students not currently eligible for core safely through World Civilization 101 with grades of "C" or better, compared to an A-B-C rate of 54% for students fully core eligible and enrolled in Fresh man composition as a co-requisite with World Civilization. These same students, if not enrolled in the project would have been barred from core for one year.

After several semesters of team teaching, when the core-eligibles

who had completed Freshman Composition before enrolling in World Civilization were compared with the ESL population, we found that the second language students (L2) achieved a 74% passing rate with A-B-C's in World Civilizations compared with 69% for core-eligibles.

We also compared the second language students to each other. We looked at the final grades of students in the project with other second language students who had completed the (unpaired) traditional ESL sequence, had completed Freshman Composition and, finally, registered in World Civilization. The paired second language students achieved a 74% passing, with A-B-C's versus their other ESL counterparts with the 70% passing rate of A-B-C's. Our paired students achieved 4% better one year earlier in their language learning process.

The implication for a change in curricular academic policy is significant. It is also inconceivable to us that the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York is moving towards excluding ESL students from the four year colleges altogether.

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